

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

TERRELL K. BROCK,

Plaintiff,

-against-

VASSAR BROTHER HOSPITAL,

Defendant.

22-CV-3998 (LTS)

ORDER OF DISMISSAL

LAURA TAYLOR SWAIN, Chief United States District Judge:

Plaintiff, who is currently incarcerated at Orleans Correctional Facility, brings this *pro se* action alleging that Defendant committed medical malpractice. By order dated June 29, 2022, the Court granted Plaintiff's request to proceed *in forma pauperis* ("IFP"), that is, without prepayment of fees.¹ For the reasons set forth in this order, the Court dismisses the action for lack of subject matter jurisdiction.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

The Prison Litigation Reform Act requires that federal courts screen complaints brought by prisoners who seek relief against a governmental entity or an officer or employee of a governmental entity. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(a). The Court must dismiss a prisoner's IFP complaint, or any portion of the complaint, that is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B), 1915A(b); *see Abbas v. Dixon*, 480 F.3d 636, 639 (2d Cir. 2007). The Court must also dismiss a complaint if the court lacks subject matter jurisdiction. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(h)(3).

¹ Prisoners are not exempt from paying the full filing fee even when they have been granted permission to proceed IFP. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1).

While the law mandates dismissal on any of these grounds, the Court is obliged to construe *pro se* pleadings liberally, *Harris v. Mills*, 572 F.3d 66, 72 (2d Cir. 2009), and interpret them to raise the “strongest [claims] that they suggest,” *Triestman v. Fed. Bureau of Prisons*, 470 F.3d 471, 474 (2d Cir. 2006) (internal quotation marks and citations omitted) (emphasis in original). But the “special solicitude” in *pro se* cases, *id.* at 475 (citation omitted), has its limits – to state a claim, *pro se* pleadings still must comply with Rule 8 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, which requires a complaint to make a short and plain statement showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.

Rule 8 requires a complaint to include enough facts to state a claim for relief “that is plausible on its face.” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007). A claim is facially plausible if the plaintiff pleads enough factual detail to allow the Court to draw the inference that the defendant is liable for the alleged misconduct. In reviewing the complaint, the Court must accept all well-pleaded factual allegations as true. *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009). But it does not have to accept as true “[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action,” which are essentially just legal conclusions. *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555. After separating legal conclusions from well-pleaded factual allegations, the Court must determine whether those facts make it plausible – not merely possible – that the pleader is entitled to relief. *Id.*

BACKGROUND

Plaintiff brings his claims using the court’s Prisoner Complaint form from 2010, but he does not specify a jurisdictional basis for his claims. He sues “Vassar Brother Hospital”² for medical malpractice and he seeks monetary damages.

² The hospital Plaintiff sues is actually named Vassar Brothers Medical Center. *See* <https://www.nuvancehealth.org/locations/vassar-brothers-medical-center>.

The following allegations are taken from the complaint. After Plaintiff was assaulted by unidentified assailants in Poughkeepsie, New York, on July 4, 2020, he went to the hospital's emergency room for medical treatment. He received staples and stitches for several lacerations to his head, and the hospital took an x-ray of his rib cage, where he was experiencing discomfort. Although Plaintiff was still in discomfort, he was discharged from the hospital. Plaintiff then went to White Plains Hospital and was diagnosed with two fractured ribs.

Plaintiff asserts that the defendant hospital's malpractice "led to pain in [his] ribs [and] discomfort" and that he had to make several trips to the emergency room from July until November 2020. (ECF 2, at 3.) He seeks \$100,000 in damages for the alleged malpractice.

DISCUSSION

The subject matter jurisdiction of the federal district courts is limited and is set forth generally in 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1332. Under these statutes, federal jurisdiction is available only when a "federal question" is presented or when plaintiff and defendant are citizens of different states and the amount in controversy exceeds the sum or value of \$75,000. "[I]t is common ground that in our federal system of limited jurisdiction any party or the court *sua sponte*, at any stage of the proceedings, may raise the question of whether the court has subject matter jurisdiction." *United Food & Commercial Workers Union, Local 919, AFL-CIO v. CenterMark Prop. Meriden Square, Inc.*, 30 F.3d 298, 301 (2d Cir. 1994) (quoting *Manway Constr. Co., Inc. v. Hous. Auth. of the City of Hartford*, 711 F.2d 501, 503 (2d Cir. 1983)); *see* Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(h)(3) ("If the court determines at any time that it lacks subject-matter jurisdiction, the court must dismiss the action."); *Ruhrgas AG v. Marathon Oil Co.*, 526 U.S. 574, 583 (1999) ("[S]ubject-matter delineations must be policed by the courts on their own initiative . . .").

To invoke federal question jurisdiction, a plaintiff's claims must arise "under the Constitution, laws, or treaties of the United States." 28 U.S.C. § 1331. A case arises under federal law if the complaint "establishes either that federal law creates the cause of action or that the plaintiff's right to relief necessarily depends on resolution of a substantial question of federal law." *Bay Shore Union Free Sch. Dist. v. Kain*, 485 F.3d 730, 734-35 (2d Cir. 2007) (quoting *Empire Healthchoice Assur., Inc. v. McVeigh*, 547 U.S. 677, 690 (2006)). Mere invocation of federal jurisdiction, without any facts demonstrating a federal law claim, does not create federal subject matter jurisdiction. *See Nowak v. Ironworkers Local 6 Pension Fund*, 81 F.3d 1182, 1188-89 (2d Cir. 1996). Plaintiff's allegations do not suggest a violation of any federal law. Rather, he asserts that the defendant hospital committed malpractice by providing inadequate medical care for his fractured ribs, a claim that arises under state law.³

Nor does Plaintiff allege facts demonstrating that the Court has diversity jurisdiction over this action to consider his state law claim. To establish jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1332, a plaintiff must first allege that the plaintiff and the defendant are citizens of different states. *Wis. Dep't of Corr. v. Schacht*, 524 U.S. 381, 388 (1998). In addition, the plaintiff must allege to a "reasonable probability" that the claim is in excess of the sum or value of \$75,000.00, the statutory jurisdictional amount. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1332(a); *Colavito v. N.Y. Organ Donor Network*,

³ Plaintiff's allegations do not suggest any possible claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, which provides a vehicle for redress of a deprivation of federally protected rights by persons acting under color of state law. To state a claim under Section 1983, a plaintiff must allege both that: (1) a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) the right was violated by a person acting under the color of state law, or a "state actor." *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48-49 (1988). Private parties are generally not liable under the statute. *Sykes v. Bank of America*, 723 F.3d 399, 406 (2d Cir. 2013) (citing *Brentwood Acad. v. Tenn. Secondary Sch. Athletic Ass'n*, 531 U.S. 288, 295 (2001)); *see also Ciambriello v. Cnty. of Nassau*, 292 F.3d 307, 323 (2d Cir. 2002) ("[T]he United States Constitution regulates only the Government, not private parties."). Plaintiff sues Vassar Brother Hospital, a private entity that is not subject to liability under Section 1983, for medical practice that occurred while he was not in custody.

Inc., 438 F.3d 214, 221 (2d Cir. 2006) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted). Plaintiff indicates in the complaint that both he and Defendant reside in New York, precluding complete diversity of citizenship.

Because Plaintiff has failed to allege facts showing that the Court has either federal question or diversity of citizenship jurisdiction of this matter, the Court dismisses Plaintiff's complaint for lack of subject matter jurisdiction. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(h)(3); *Makarova v. United States*, 201 F.3d 110, 113 (2d Cir. 2000) ("A plaintiff asserting subject matter jurisdiction has the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence that it exists.").

District courts generally grant a *pro se* plaintiff an opportunity to amend a complaint to cure its defects, but leave to amend is not required where it would be futile. *See Hill v. Curcione*, 657 F.3d 116, 123–24 (2d Cir. 2011); *Salahuddin v. Cuomo*, 861 F.2d 40, 42 (2d Cir. 1988). Because the defects in Plaintiff's complaint cannot be cured with an amendment, the Court declines to grant Plaintiff leave to amend his complaint.

CONCLUSION

Plaintiff's complaint, filed IFP under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(1), is dismissed for lack of subject matter jurisdiction. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(h)(3).

The Court certifies under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3) that any appeal from this order would not be taken in good faith, and therefore IFP status is denied for the purpose of an appeal. *See Coppedge v. United States*, 369 U.S. 438, 444-45 (1962).

SO ORDERED.

Dated: July 26, 2022
New York, New York

/s/ Laura Taylor Swain

LAURA TAYLOR SWAIN
Chief United States District Judge